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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: EASTERN SUDAN - IN ANY OTHER COUNTRY, IT WOULD BE THE
CRISIS

REF: KHARTOUM 446

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Charge Fernandez traveled to Kassala, in eastern Sudan, May 4-5 to meet with local political representatives and tour two locations ripe for USAID help: the flood-prone Al Gash River and the horrifically rundown Kassala hospital. This was the first trip to Kassala by a U.S. chief of mission in years. As noted in reftel, there continue to be loud rumblings of discontent and renewed talks of war among members of the Eastern Front. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) BACKGROUND: The poverty in eastern Sudan is striking, even compared to other parts of the country with malnutrition, health and education levels worse than war-torn Darfur and undeveloped South Sudan. The Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA), signed in 2007, is often overshadowed by the CPA and the crisis in Darfur. The agreement, signed in Asmara between the Government of Sudan and the "Eastern Front" rebel group, promised USD 600 million in development over five years, the approximate amount that had been spent on war in the east, but little of that has appeared. END BACKGROUND.

¶3. (SBU) On May 4, Charge Fernandez began his visit to Kassala by meeting with Mohamed Salih Abid, the deputy governor of Kassala State and the State Minister of Health and Ali Awad Mohamed Musa, State Minister of Finance. Abid immediately noted that "90 percent of the ESPA" has been implemented, and that USD 35 million of the East Construction Fund will soon to be awarded for building schools and medical centers.

¶4. (SBU) Next up was the meeting with the local NCP representatives, Zohair Abu Sin and Ali Awad Mohamed Musa, Chair of the Consultation Council. Abu Sin and Musa reiterated the NCP's "commitment to fully implement all peace agreements" and said their party had "no benefit or interest being an enemy of the U.S."

¶5. (SBU) As expected, this meeting with the NCP contrasted sharply with the Charge's next two meetings, with the local DUP and SPLM representatives. Mohamed Medani, Chair of the SPLM for Kassala State, and Mustafa Hassan Mustafa, Minister of Culture and Information for Kassala State, said there was "no coordination between the NCP and the SPLM" on the rebuilding of the region and made specific mention of the NCP's "policy of deception and mockery." "The NCP gave us half a Ministry - only the Minister and his car - we are deprived from any resources to deliver services to the people." The SPLM representatives did note, however, that they had "excellent relations" with the Eastern Front and voted together in local councils but underscored that the NCP had given the Eastern Front nominal control while retaining firm control on the region's purse strings. A particular complaint is how the NCP has rigged the membership of the board that will decide how to spend the chimerical 600 million dollars in its favor.

¶6. (SBU) May 4 ended with a meeting with the Eastern Front. Salah Barkwin, the Eastern Front Secretary of Kassala State, was adamant about the "real political conflict between the NCP and all the other parties." Also in attendance were other local representatives from the Beja Congress and the Free Lions Movement who make up the front: "from 1958 (when the Beja Congress was founded) until now, we have

had the same complaints about poverty and marginalization and nothing has really been addressed. The conditions that have led to war in the past are still with us." Speaking to the urgent need of development, the representatives of the Eastern Front focused on the basics: health care, education and infrastructure. (As if on cue, the power then cut out and the rest of the meeting was lit by the headlights of a truck.)

¶17. (SBU) Of particular concern to the Eastern Front are the DDR concerns of their former fighters. The NCP now says that "the donors didn't come up with the money for reintegration" and Khartoum can't do anything. "We didn't read the fine print," noted one chagrined leader. Rebels who staked everything on a political cause now face a future of poverty and marginalization, while their former oppressors wax fat on State-sanctioned corruption that is remarkable by Sudanese standards. In the former rebel-controlled enclave of Hamesh Koreib, the NCP and Sudanese intelligence have reinstalled traditional sheikhs with resulting plummeting education rates: one percent of girls in the region attend school and 4 percent of boys. "What progress we made in liberated zones is erased," one mourned.

¶18. (SBU) Like the SPLM, the Eastern Front fears it is being "set up" to fail by the NCP. It has authority but no real power and no resources to deliver a tangible development dividend to desperate people. Many of its leaders, both in Khartoum and in the East, feel trapped. The Eastern Peace Agreement is indeed being fulfilled but it has also not definitively changed the balance of power. Barkwin noted to CDA, "we have peace and we are not arrested or prevented speaking by the security services, but in the end, is not enough." All meetings with political parties were attended by the jovial local NISS representative, a level of monitoring not seen even in Darfur.

KHARTOUM 00000701 002 OF 002

¶19. (U) Beyond the political meetings, the American delegation also toured the banks of the Al Gash River, where rising sediment creates crippling annual flash floods in a usually parched landscape. A visit to Kassala's teaching hospital was also part of the agenda; a very basic, dirty and forlorn facility, it is nonetheless the best in the state. Education, flood control, health and creating livelihoods dominated the discussion and dialogue between local officials and USAID.

¶10. (SBU) COMMENT: In any other country, the status of Kassala and the rest of the east would easily be considered an emergency-level humanitarian crisis. This being Sudan, however, eastern Sudan gets only 3rd billing, when it is remembered at all. Largely ignored by the international community but relatively stable, for the moment, the region presents a unique opportunity for development. Done quickly and done well, a reinvigorated East could serve as a model for the rest of war-torn Sudan. Such support would also have a significant political dimension, it would empower former rebels - allied with the SPLM - in a much needed electoral and political alliance of Sudan's marginalized peoples. End comment.

FERNANDEZ